

Memorandum

To: Members of the Multi-Modal Transportation Task Force
From: Alan Wickman
Date: February 9, 2004
Subject: Comments on the SRF Consulting Matrix

After doing a little bit of rearrangement, I have responded to each of the bicycling-related comments contained in the SRF Consulting Matrix.

For the most part, I am supportive of the suggestions, but it is hard for me to look at things in the context of a "wish list" where money is no object. That isn't realistic. Instead, I attempted to approach things from the point of view of a person or a group that needs to establish some priorities. When we do this, some of the items in the third column of the SRF matrix need to be put a very long ways into the future.

Clearly, however, the city needs to commit to spending some money if anything even remotely close to this dream is ever to get close to reality. For this purpose of prioritization, I suggest that the #1 priority ought to be the hiring of a bicycle/pedestrian coordinator (or "advocate") within city government. The goals contained in this list will require the participation of a diverse group of people, institutions and interests. This simply can't happen unless there is a person within city government that takes responsibility to pull all these diverse ideas together, work with people throughout the community, and make things happen.

I'd like to take credit for this idea, but I can't. Rather, it was the #1 suggestion arising out of a charrette held a couple of years ago by the city to get ideas relating to the Comprehensive Plan's treatment of alternative modes of transportation. I think that it was an excellent suggestion for a #1 priority. It bears repeating.

Please let me know if you have any questions with regard to these items.

attachment

Multi-Use Trails	
<p><i>There were four related recommendations:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The trails network will be developed and linked consistent with present plans. 2. Expand the urban and rural system of trails. All existing arterial roads will be retrofitted with multi-use trails. 3. Multi-use trails and bicycle lanes will be included with future arterial roads. 4. Existing arterial roads will be retrofitted with multi-use trails. 	<p>I combined these related recommendations for purposes of commentary. Boiled down, these statements amount to:</p> <p>(1) All existing arterial roads will be retrofitted with multi-use trails, and (2) All future arterial roads will have both bike lanes <u>and</u> multi-use trails.</p> <p>As an avid bicyclist, I might not object if my tax dollars were spent in this fashion, but I am realistic enough to know that the taxpayers of Lincoln won't buy the price tag for this ambitious objective. I think that a more realistic approach, yet one that is more aggressive with trail development than current plans, is likely to serve Lincoln's bicyclists better than what is described. For benefits that go beyond mere transportation, I think that greenway-type trails need to be placed just about everywhere that the opportunity is presented. They should be incorporated into the planning for all new residential developments.</p> <p>With regard to existing arterials, multi-use trails that are adjacent to streets and that don't eliminate street crossings would be nothing more than wide sidewalks. While taking the cyclist out of traffic between intersections, they create worse exposures for cyclists at intersections and at driveways. Bicyclists would be helped more by bike lanes or other roadway engineering to make the arterial street bicycle-friendly. (Multi-use trails with grade separations at intersections are great for bicyclists, but the cost of retrofitting existing arterials on a widespread basis would surely be prohibitive.)</p> <p>With regard to future arterial roads, while I agree with bike lanes or other bicycle-friendly engineering, I question the cost effectiveness of both bike lanes <u>and</u> multi-use trails. Sure, that would be nice for bicyclists, but it seems like an undue amount of additional expense.</p> <p>Although I haven't distilled the wording precisely, my recommendation is that Lincoln's roadway and trail system be engineered so that a bicyclist can go from any point "A" to any point "B" without needing to travel on streets that are "hostile" to bicyclists (e.g., almost all of 27th Street or almost all of "O" Street), and without needing to travel appreciably farther than a motorist would need to travel. But agreeing to a recommendation that multi-use paths be put adjacent to South 9th Street, South 10th Street, South 13th Street, South 16th Street and South 17th Street – especially when some of the intervening streets are excellent for bicycle traffic – just doesn't make good sense.</p>

Multi-Use Trails (continued)	
Numerous links from the trails to a bicycle lane system will be created.	Makes sense.
The City will add more landscaping.	I make a distinction between what I call greenway-like trails and trails that are little more than “glorified sidewalks.” The greenway-like trails are desirable for many users and for many reasons. I believe that they contribute to nearby property values. Multi-use trails that are simply wide sidewalks next to the street don’t offer this same enhancement to property values and they often aren’t all that great for bicyclists, either (i.e., when they have frequent street or driveway crossings).
The City, County and State will increase funding for the Salt Valley Heritage Greenway/Beltway.	I haven’t done the homework necessary to comment on this.
Multi-use trails will be built 12 to 14 feet wide to accommodate traffic volumes, two-abreast riding and a variety of users (cyclists, walkers, runners, in-line skaters, roller skiers). Centerline and edge striping will be included.	I certainly agree that many or most trails need to be wider. Most bicyclists and pedestrians are very considerate of each other, but I have also witnessed and experienced numerous times that bicyclists have buzzed pedestrians pretty closely. With rare exception, I would blame the bicyclist when this occurs, but narrow trails create far too many situations where this will happen. I am not enough of an engineer to know what width is best for various usage levels, but I think that almost all trails should be widened some, and the more heavily used trails (e.g., the Rock Island Trail) should be given extra attention.
Consistent and attractive signs and maps will be installed system-wide.	I haven’t felt that lack of signage to be a noticeable problem with the current system, and I certainly don’t think that a bunch of extra signs will add that much to the system, but it is hard to argue with a recommendation for “consistent and attractive” signs.
Striping, signage, surface smoothness and cleanliness will be maintained to a high level.	These items are roughly translated as “maintenance,” and I agree that we need to spend a little more money on it. Over the years, there have been a number of places on Lincoln’s trails with bad bumps where trails cross streets and where pieces of concrete abut.
On-Road Bike Lanes	
Lanes will be added to key streets by, in come (sic) cases, removing parking if necessary.	A bike lane placed such that it exposes bicyclists to car doors being opened is a bad idea – worse than no bike lane at all. The “key” aspect to this statement is the interpretation of the word “key.” What is a “key street?” In my mind, the most important “key streets” would be arterials where alternate routes are not nearby and convenient. An example of this might be 33 rd Street between “A” Street and East Campus.
Striping, signage, surface smoothness and cleanliness will be maintained to a high level.	Agreed.

On-Road Bike Lanes (continued)	
<p>Lanes will be extended across bridges either on-street or on a widened sidewalk.</p>	<p>As a generalization, bridges are not a big challenge for Lincoln's bicyclists, but it is certainly clear that a street with a bike lane needs to make reasonable provision for bicyclists when the street crosses a bridge.</p>
<p>All streets will be considered part of the bicycle network. To that end, traffic calming measures will be applied on troublesome local and collector streets, including but not limited to on-street parking, narrow widths, speed plateaus, traffic circles, curb bump-outs and street trees. Only bicycle-friendly grates will be used.</p>	<p>One of the Task Force members suggested substitution of the word "selected" for "all." I think that I know where he is coming from, but I feel that the word "selected" would be much too restrictive. If the Task Force feels more comfortable with a restriction of some kind, then I would suggest something like the following:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">"With perhaps a very few exceptions – highly traveled streets where multi-use paths or other alternatives are convenient – all streets will be considered part of the bicycle network."</p> <p>I am a little puzzled by the second sentence, because I am not precisely sure what it refers to. If it refers to residential streets and streets near the downtown area with a 25mph speed limit, then I have trouble thinking of a street that is much of a problem. Perhaps 21st Street from Lincoln High to "R" Street might be an example, but that will be going away with the Antelope Valley project. If the reference is to 35mph streets like Vine, Randolph, 33rd, 40th, etc., then I think that bike lanes would be a better accommodation than measures to slow down traffic. In general, I think that this needs to be a little more specific. I don't sense that bicyclists have many problems with 25mph streets in Lincoln, and I certainly don't think that motorists are going to be enthusiastic about measures designed to make their trips longer yet.</p>

<p align="center">Bicycle Parking</p>	
<p><i>There were two related recommendations:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Racks will be promoted for all retail or office buildings, multi-family housing and schools (including high schools) in convenient locations. 2. Lockers will be installed Downtown, at the University and other major transit stops. A cost-share program with the City will be instituted. 	<p>A recent local survey placed bicycle parking near the top of list in terms of things to encourage bicycling. I agree, and I would like to emphasize the importance of these two recommendations.</p> <p>Some bicyclists ride bicycles worth less than \$100, while others may ride bicycles worth \$1000 or more. Almost without regard to the worth of your bicycle, however, getting your bicycle stolen is a very discouraging event. And stealing a bicycle – or equipment off the bicycle – is very easy to do. Most chains and cables can be easily cut with a bolt cutter. I lost the key to a brand name U-lock and had to cut the shackle. I found that I could do so easily and quickly using a battery powered Dremel tool. The security provided by locks is limited. In addition, equipment (seats, seatposts, handlebars, stems, front wheels, etc.) can be stolen from an exposed bicycle, even when the frame and rear wheel are locked. (Certain tricks can help reduce this exposure, but they are inconvenient for the bicyclist.)</p> <p>My point is that either bicycle lockers or other restricted-access facilities are necessary if the Task Force wants to let bicycle owners feel comfortable riding a bicycle to work, especially a higher valued bicycle. I have a secure place inside my office area that I can leave my bicycle, and it makes a great deal of difference to me. If employers would allow this generally – and most probably have some out-of-the-way place that could be used – this would be a big step to promote riding bicycles to work. Another secure alternative – bicycle lockers – can be very helpful where they are practical and the costs can be met or otherwise justified.</p> <p>The bottom line is that bicycle parking is important and shouldn't be ignored or slighted.</p>
<p align="center">Bicycle Interface with Transit</p>	
<p>Racks will be included on all busses.</p>	<p>The Task Force appeared to agree unanimously with this recommendation, yet the Task Force also appeared to accept Larry Worth's comments in his presentation when he said that StarTran had tried bicycle racks on busses and decided against them.</p> <p>In fact, I had followed up on Mr. Worth's comments and asked for more explanation, which he provided. My question and his response are included in the material from last fall. He identified the costs and problems with washing busses with the bike racks on them. He also noted that Lincoln's busses are interchangeable between routes and it</p>

<p>Racks will be included on all busses. (continued)</p>	<p>wouldn't be practical (currently, anyway) to just have bike racks on busses for certain routes where bicycle rack usage might be higher.</p> <p>In the material that I distributed to the Task Force last month on behalf of the Great Plains Bicycling Club, the League of American Bicyclists also recommended racks on busses, but the GPBC noted that the costs would be difficult to justify, at least in the near term with a city of Lincoln's size. With most people riding the bus 3 or 4 miles, it is unlikely that a person will ride a bicycle to the bus stop, load the bicycle on a rack, remove the bicycle from the rack at the other end, and then ride the bicycle to his/her final destination. Rather, the person would just ride the bicycle the entire distance.</p> <p>If/when Lincoln gets 50% or 100% larger and bus routes get longer and express busses are used more often, then the idea of bike racks may make more sense for these situations. But I don't see this as something that should be a priority in the near term.</p> <p>I say this even though bicycling and bus transportation complement each other, in that the combination of the two can go a long ways towards allowing a family or a couple to manage their transportation needs with one car instead of two.</p>
<p>Education, Promotion and Enforcement</p>	
<p>City-wide bicycle and walking route maps will be provided on paper and on signs.</p>	<p>I'm not so sure that we need to have bike routes on signs, although I certainly agree that it would be nice to (continue to) have high quality bicycle route maps on paper.</p>
<p>The national Safe Routes to School program will continue to be implemented, including engineering, enforcement, education, and empowerment.</p>	<p>I agree, but I don't want to gloss over this point, because I believe that a close review will find that Lincoln falls well short of the ideals for this national program. I also think that, in making this recommendation, that members of the Task Force should be given a little more of an idea as to the details of the Safe Routes to School program. It is much more than just showing little Susie or Johnny the best way to walk to school.</p>
<p>Schools, including high schools, will be sited and designed to aid access by bicycling and walking. Features will include small sites, maintaining older, "neighborhood" schools, adjacent parks, and placement in the center of neighborhoods when there is an adequate collector street.</p>	<p>I have nothing against this recommendation, but Lincoln has just built two new high schools, which means that it will probably be decades before we build another new high school at a new location. We may build a few middle schools and elementary schools, but I think that our primary focus for the next few decades will need to be what the Lincoln Public Schools can do to facilitate and encourage safe bicycling to their current locations.</p>

Education, Promotion and Enforcement (continued)	
<p><i>There were two related recommendations:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A program of bicyclist education will be conducted including traffic laws, defensive riding, and the use of helmets, lights and reflectors. 2. Drivers will be educated regarding the rights and obligations of bicyclists in the street. 	<p>I agree with both of these recommendations. Getting appropriate materials will take some work, but the big challenge will be to get the message to the intended audience. The Lincoln Public Schools would be one place with a captive audience, but that will take a commitment that is not present today. But how do we reach the adult bicyclist or potential adult bicyclist? How do we reach the driver that doesn't sense any lack of knowledge? Working on solving these problems is something that a city bicycle – pedestrian coordinator would be necessary to do.</p>
<p>The City and StarTran will initiate an annual "bike-bus-and-car-pool to work" day.</p>	<p>I think that this is a great idea. It could be on National Bike-to-Work Day or during that week or month. Lincoln currently has May and June designated as bicycle months, but the only activity of significance occurring during that span of time is the Journal-Star's Trail Trek. It is a commendable event, but it doesn't focus on alternative transportation to work.</p>
<p>Traffic regulations will be more strictly enforced for bicyclists so as to improve safety and elevate their status as vehicles. Laws will be changed to give bicyclists priority in the street.</p>	<p>I am a little puzzled by the statement that, "laws will be changed to give bicyclists priority in the street." I don't know what that means. On its face, I disagree with it. A general principle of bicycle safety is that a bicycle in the streets should act in much the same way as a motor vehicle, so that bicyclists' actions will be predictable to motorists. Does this recommendation mean that laws are to be changed so that motorists are supposed to yield the right of way to a bicyclist in situations where they wouldn't yield the right-of-way to a motor vehicle? I don't think that would be a good idea.</p> <p>Lincoln and Nebraska both have bicycling-related ordinances that require change, but I wouldn't characterize the purpose of those changes as being to, "give bicyclists priority in the street." Rather, we simply need to fix some laws so that they make a little more sense.</p>
<p>Education about bicycling and walking will be provided by the City for design professionals, City staff and law enforcement officers.</p>	<p>I agree, although I think that the reference to "city staff" is a little vague. I'm not sure who is intended to be covered by this statement.</p>

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